

Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY LA PAZ
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 QUITO 2888

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT
SUBJECT: SIXTO DURAN THREATENS WITHDRAWAL AS RETORNO APPROACHES
CRISIS

SUMMARY: SIXTO DURAN-BALLEN, THE PRESIDENTIAL FRONTRUNNER, THREATENED TO WITHDRAW HIS CANDIDACY IN THE FACE OF RECENT SUPREME ELECTORAL TRIBUNAL DECISIONS DISQUALIFYING AND THREATENING TO DISQUALIFY CANDIDATES AND PARTIES FOR THE JULY 16 ELECTIONS. UNDERSCORING DURAN BALLEEN'S REMARKS WERE THE RESIGNATIONS OF SEVERAL MEMBERS OF THE TRIBUNAL. LIBERAL CANDIDATE FRANCISCO HUERTA MONTALVO PRESENTED AN APPEAL OF HIS DISQUALIFICATION TO THE SUPREME COURT AND ALSO SENT HIS FOLLOWERS INTO THE S STREETS. MEETINGS HAVE TAKEN PLACE TO REPLACE HUERTA MONTALVO WITH HIS UNCLE, RAUL CLEMENTE HUERTA RENDON. THE EVENTS ARE LEADING TO A CRISIS IN THE RETORNO PROCESS WHICH MAY REACH A CLIMAX BY EARLY NEXT WEEK. END SUMMARY.

1. SIXTO DURAN-BALLEN, WHO AS THE HEAD OF A MULTIPARTY CENTER-RIGHT COALITION HAS BEEN CONSIDERED THE FRONTRUNNER IN THE PRESIDENTIAL RACE, ANNOUNCED IN A PRESS CONFERENCE ON APRIL 28 THAT HE WAS DEEPLY DISMAYED BY THE RECENT DECISIONS
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OF THE SUPREME ELECTORAL TRIBUNAL (SET) AND STATED THAT HE MIGHT WITHDRAW HIS CANDIDACY BECAUSE OF THEM. DURAN-BALLEN CITED THE DISQUALIFICATION OF LIBERAL PARTY CANDIDATE FRANCISCO HUERTA MONTALVO, THE FAILURE TO RECOGNIZE THE PEOPLE'S PATRIOTIC PARTY (PPP), THE RUMOR OF THE IMMINENT DISQUALIFICATIONS OF VICE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE OSVALDO HURTADO, AND PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE CAMILO MENA AND ABDON CALDERON ON TECHNICALITIES,

AND IRREGULARITIES IN THE NAMING OF MEMBERS OF SET AS THE PROXIMATE CAUSES OF HIS DISAPPOINTMENT. HE ALSO ACCUSED SET PRESIDENT JOSE BAQUERO DE LA CALLE OF SPECULATING ON THE POSSIBILITY THAT DURAN-BALLEN, TOO, MIGHT BE DISQUALIFIED, WHICH, HE CHARGED, WAS A BETRAYAL OF A TRUST. DURAN-BALLEN STATED, ""UNLESS THERE ARE APPROPRIATE ATTITUDES BY BOTH THE SET ... THERE CANNOT BE A STABLE ENVIRONMENT WITHIN WHICH TO CONTINUE THE POLITICAL PROCESS, AND I WOULD CONSIDER THE WITHDRAWAL OF MY CANDIDACY IF I DETERMINE THAT THE PREVAILING CONDITIONS ARE NOT THOSE WHICH LEND THEMSELVES TO THE FREE EXPRESSION OF EVERY CITIZEN, OF HIS WILL, AND OF THE FREE PARTICIPATION IN THE DEMOCRATIC GAME."

2. DURAN-BALLEN'S DRAMATIC STATEMENT WAS THE HIGHLIGHT OF A DAY FILLED WITH EVENTS WHICH POINTED TO GROWING CIVIC DISENCHANTMENT WITH THE WAY THE ELECTORAL PROCESS IS BEING CARRIED OUT. EARLIER, THREE OF THE SEVEN MEMBERS OF THE SET--- A CONSERVATIVE, A LEADER OF THE RIGHT-WING ARNE, AND AN INDEPENDENT---RESIGNED IN PROTEST OVER SET DECISIONS. THE ARNISTA, FEDERICO VEINTIMILLA (BROTHER OF HIGH FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIAL HERNAN VEINTIMILLA), DECLARED THAT IT WAS CLEAR TO HIM WHEN THE HUERTA CANDIDACY AND PARTY RECOGNITION WERE BEING DISCUSSED THAT THERE EXISTED AN "INTRIGUE". RUMORS THAT BAQUERO, AND TWO OTHER SET MEMBERS, RODRIGO ALVAREZ SAA OF OTTO AROSEMENA'S CID, AND RAFAEL ARIZAGA OF CARLOS JULIO AROSEMENA'S PNR ARE INVOLVED IN A CONSPIRACY WITH THE MILITARY

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TO BRING ABOUT THE PRESIDENTIAL SUCCESSION OF LIBERAL RAUL CLEMENTE HUERTA RENDON ARE RIFE AND HAVE BEGUN TO APPEAR IN THE MEDIA.

3. FRANCISCO HUERTA, DISQUALIFIED BY THE SET THE DAY BEFORE, FILED HIS APPEAL WITH THE SUPREME COURT. SUPREME COURT PRESIDENT GONZALO KOROLYS PROMISED A FAIR, SERENE AND RAPID DECISION BASED UPON THE LAW. HOWEVER, SINCE KAROLYS IS WIDELY BELIEVED TO BE A STOOGE FOR THE MILITARY ON A COURT THE GOE PACKED ONLY LAST DECEMBER TO INSURE ITS CONTROL, THERE HAS BEEN MUCH DOUBT EXPRESSED PRIVATELY THAT THE COURT WILL DECIDE INDEPENDENTLY.

4. FRANCISCO HUERTA HAS DECIDED THAT HE WILL NOT TAKE HIS DISQUALIFICATION LYING DOWN AND CONTINUED TO CHARGE THAT THE MILITARY IS LOOKING FOR AN ECUADOREAN BORDABERRY, WITHOUT SPECIFICALLY MENTIONING HIS UNCLE'S NAME. TO DEMONSTRATE HIS DETERMINATION, HUERTA ORDERED HIS SUPPORTERS INTO THE STREETS YESTERDAY. HE PERSONALLY LED A GROUP OF 300 LIBERAL YOUTH WHO CLASHED BRIEFLY WITH POLICE IN THE STREETS OF QUITO. OTHER DEMONSTRATIONS AND SCUFFLES REPORTEDLY OCCURRED IN ESMERALDAS, GUAYAS, TULCAN, AND CHIMBORAZO. HUERTA ALSO

OBTAINED YXESTERDAY FROM THE LIBERSL SUPREME COUNCIL UNANIMOUS SUPPORT FOR HIS APPEAL BEFORE THE SUPREME COURT. HE TOLD EMBOFF THAT HE WAS GRATIFIED BY THE REACTION OF THE COUNCIL MEMBERS, BUT HINTED THAT THERE WAS LIKELY TO BE A SERIOUS FIGHT WITHIN THE COUNCIL IF THE SUPREME COURT HANDS DOWN A NEGATIVE DECISION IN THE NEXT FEW DAYS. HE ALSO SAID THAT HE WAS TOUCHED BY SIXTO DURAN-BALLEN'S STATEMENT WHICH HE THOUGHT MIGHT OPEN UP NEW AVENUES.

5. WHILE RAUL CLEMENTE HUERTA RENDON HAS NOT MADE HIMSELF AVAILABLE FOR COMMENT, A CABAL COMPOSED PRINCIPALLY OF THOSE WHO LOBBIED TO ANULL THE REFERENDUM VOTE, IS MAKING STATEMENTS THAT A "NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC FRONT" WILL BE ESTABLISHED IN THE NEXT FEW DAYS TO LAUNCH HUERTA RENDON'S CANDIDACY.
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 QUITO 2888

6. THERE HAS BEEN SPARCE EDITORIAL COMMENT THUS FAR. THE APRIL 29 EL COMERCIO IN A SURPRISING DEPARTURE FROM ITS USUAL FENCE STRADDLING, CONDEMNED THE SET'S DECISION ON HUERTA'S CANDIDACY AS BEING "ABSOLUTELY UNEXPLAINABLE." IT ACCUSED THE SET OF IGNORING THE DESIRE OF THE CITIZENRY TO EXERCISE ITS RIGHT OF SUFFRAGE AND TO RETURN TO CONSTITUTIONALISM. TELENACIONAL COMMENTATOR DIEGO OQUENDO IN AN IMPASSIONED

EDITORIAL ON APRIL 28 DECLARED THAT THE PATIENCE OF ECUADOREANS WITH THE GOVERNMENT WAS EXHAUSTED BY THE SET ACTIONS, LAUDED THE DURAN-BALLEN STATEMENT, AND SUGGESTED THAT OTHER CANDIDATES MIGHT CONSIDER WITHDRAWING IN PROTEST AS WELL. EL TELEGRAFXMO, WHICH HAS LED A THINLY-VEILED CAMPAIGN ON BEHALF OF RAUL CLEMENTE DESPITE ITS OFFICIAL ENDORSEMENT OF DURAN-BALLEN, CALLED FOR PEACE AND CALM AND RESPECT FOR THE LAW.

7. COMMENT: THE RETORNO PROCESS, IN ITS PROJECTED FORM, MAY BE REACHING THE CRISIS STAGE. THE CLIMAX MAY BE REACHED EARLY NEXT WEEK WHEN THE SUPREME COURT WILL PROBABLY REJECT HUERTA MONTALVO'S APPEAL, WHEN HUERTA RENDON WILL HAVE TO SHOW HIS INTENTIONS, AND WHEN THE SET ISSUES ITS DECISIONS ON THE OTHER CANDIDACIES. NEVERTHELESS, WHILE THE RECENT SET ACTIONS HAVE ANGERED, EXASPERATED, AND FRUSTRATED A BROAD SPECTRUM OF

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OPINION AND SEEM TO HAVE BROUGHT CIVILIAN POLITICAL COMPETITION TO THE BRINK OF CHAOS, THERE HAS BEEN LITTLE TALK OF THAT THE MILITARY IS SEEKING TO USE THE SITUATION AS A PRETEXT TO CONTINUE IN POWER. MOST CONSIDER THAT THE PRESENT SITUATION IS A CONSEQUENCE OF THE MILITARY'S HUBRIS IN NOT BEING SATISFIED TO LEAVE WELL ENOUGH ALONE AND BEING TEMPTED TO ASSURE ITS OWN FUTURE WITH A GOVERNMENT OF ITS OWN DESIGN.

8. WE BELIEVE THAT DURAN-BALLEN'S STATEMENT STEMMED PRINCIPALLY FROM A RIGHTEOUS CONCERN ABOUT THE PRESENT COURSE OF EVENTS. NONETHELESS, HE MAY ALSO PERCEIVE THAT THE CONSPIRACY TO BRING HUERTA RENDON INTO THE RACE IS AIMED AS MUCH AGAINST HIM AS AGAINST ANY GROUP OR CANDIDATE ON THE CENTER LEFT. WHATEVER HIS MOTIVES, IT IS BEING TAKEN AT FACE VALUE BY MANY WHO HAVE NOT PLEDGED THEIR SUPPORT TO HIM. HE COULD THUS BECOME A RALLYING POINT FOR DISPARATE ELEMENTS, INCLUDING THE HUERTA MONTALVO FOLLOWERS, SHOULD THEY SEE THEIR OWN LEGITIMATE ELECTORAL HOPES FRUSTRATED BY THE GOE'S MACHINATIONS.

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